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## A harmless solution to pesky birds for businesses

*By Pat Sisneros and Juergen Kneifel, Herald Columnists*

Gary Crawford is an inventor. He's also a small business owner and an entrepreneur.

His story reminds us of just how many interesting twists and turns an idea or concept can take before it becomes a business reality. Crawford's Everett-based business, Bird Buffer, manufactures a device that repels birds and is environmentally friendly.

An animal lover, Crawford raised and trained pigeons as a kid and wanted to find a way to help people and industry without hurting unwanted birds.

A good idea usually starts with a problem that requires a solution. Crawford had plenty of practice before opening his own business.

His early years in special effects work for Hollywood studios and with big-time producers, including Steven Spielberg, taught him how to solve an imaginary challenge dreamed up by a producer.

Then folks in the dairy industry approached Crawford years ago with a challenge to rid dairy barns of a real problem -- birds that like to nest in the warm, comfortable confines of the rafters. Birds can raise havoc in dairies. Their droppings can cause disease; their presence might even contribute to stress and reduced milk production.

Working with fog machines, haze machines, lighting and a variety of special effects, Crawford stumbled upon an idea for ridding certain areas of birds.

"Birds have a great sensitivity to smell and apparently don't care for the aroma of grapes," he said.

He was nearing the solution, using a haze machine and grape-scented vapor, undetectable by humans. Early testing of the machine was successful to rid barns of these unwelcome residents.

Then disaster: The dairy and beef industry was hit hard with mad cow disease, causing a major drop in dairy and beef prices. Farmers no longer could afford to move forward with this newly designed solution. And Crawford faced a new challenge: how to move forward when his intended target market moved to pasture.

He decided to explore alternate applications. Where else are people trying to shoo birds from their premises? How about restaurants, outdoor markets, airport hangars, warehouses and big-box stores? Yes for all. Crawford patented the machine using the grape vapor solution. It turned out that there are many market applications for the product.

Today there are about 40 Costco locations using the Bird Buffer at their food courts. Some even position a unit near their receiving doors to keep birds from entering the warehouse and taking up residence inside the store. Where in use, customers are able to enjoy their hotdogs or pizza in the food court without pesky birds flying overhead or landing near their table. In fact, most of these same stores have tried other bird deterrents (netting, truss-spikes and other remedies) with little success.

Crawford also mentioned a manufacturer of silicone, a rubberlike product that is heat resistant, which had chemical pipes being corroded by bird droppings. The damage required an annual expenditure in excess of \$20,000 for cleaning and repair. With the Bird Buffer in operation, the problems were solved.

For more information, you can go to the company's website, [birdbuffer.com](http://birdbuffer.com).

It's great to see that Crawford didn't let the idea die when his initial industry partners were hit with economic calamity. It turns out that a good entrepreneur keeps asking questions.

*Pat Sisneros is the vice president of College Services at Everett Community College. Juergen Kneifel is an associate faculty member with EvCC's entrepreneurship program. Please send your comments to [entrepreneurship@everettcc.edu](mailto:entrepreneurship@everettcc.edu)*

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